
SEXUAL ABUSE: PROTECTING YOUR CHILD AT SCHOOL

Usually school is a safe haven, where children are free to learn, make friends and have fun. That's why it's so hard to imagine that for some students school is a fearful place, and sometimes the source of that fear is a teacher who is sexually abusing them. Teachers sexually exploiting children in schools is a difficult subject to deal with. But as parents and caregivers, we cannot ignore this problem. An AP (Associated Press) national investigation identified 2,570 cases from 2001 through 2005 in which teachers were punished or removed from the classroom for sexual misconduct.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Talk to your children. Make sure they feel comfortable telling you if a teacher, or anyone, has said or done something that makes them uncomfortable. Be a good listener.

Check communication between teacher and student.

Monitor e-mails, text messages, phone calls, Internet social networking and blogs, greeting cards and yearbooks. A teacher's communications should be about school, not the child's personal life.

Monitor activities. After-school activities should be encouraged, but be aware of time spent with a teacher and what goes on. There should be no out-of-school, one-on-one meetings.

Be suspicious of gifts or car rides. Most experts say teachers should not be giving gifts to individual students or car rides, except for emergencies.

Notice how your child and their friends talk about teachers. If they say a teacher is a "friend," find out more. If they joke or mention rumors about a teacher's crush, or that a teacher is a "perv," don't dismiss it. Ask why they say that.

Watch for abusive or sexual behavior. If your child tells you that a teacher made a sexual joke, brushed up against her, discusses sex or requested a kiss or a date, find out more. Bring it to the attention of school authorities and the police.

Question your child if you suspect abuse. Try to stay calm. Children have a hard time telling the difference between your disapproval of an adult's behavior and your disapproval of them.

Don't keep it to yourself. If you're suspicious, talk to school authorities. They can question other teachers and students. Follow up and make sure school officials take action. If you think a crime has occurred and school authorities don't take you seriously, contact child protective services or the police.

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1-800-552-7096 Virginia Child Abuse Hotline (language line available)